Doing What Is Most Important

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

February 4, 2024

What is the most important thing for human beings as they live together? It is to love—to love one another. Especially as Christians, we are taught that loving one another is the most important of all. Many important things are listed in Scripture, but love is greater and more indispensable than any of them. This is true not only for Christians but also for those who are not Christians. Yet we must also recognize that there is a great difference between the love of ordinary people and the love of Christians.

I. The Source of Love

The source of human love is God, who created human beings in His own image. Love comes from God. Because we were made in God's image, we were created as beings capable of love, able to love others. The love we speak of here is not simply a matter of "liking." It is to cherish others, to desire their happiness, and to act for their good. This meaning of love is quite different from the way the word is often used in the secular world.

Christian love, however, goes further. Human nature, created in God's image, has been distorted, damaged, and destroyed by sin. Thus, even when people intend to love, they find themselves unable to do so. They cannot love as they wish; they are helpless and frustrated. But Christian love is enabled by a special power from God. Christians are made able to love through God's strength.

A Christian is one who has been transferred from the dominion of sin and the devil into the dominion of God—that is, into the kingdom of God. While we still live in this world and are not yet completely free from the power of sin and the devil, we have been brought under God's rule and given His power to live anew. Therefore, God's love—His essential nature—is poured again into our weakened humanity, strengthening us to love.

Christians will only be completely freed from the power of sin and the devil, and restored to the original state of being made in God's image, when Christ comes again. At His return, we will be fully transformed into His likeness. Only then will we be able to love perfectly. Until that time, we wait.

Yet even now, while still living in this world, Christians have been given a stronger ability to love than others. We are taught, urged, and encouraged to love. To love is our calling. And when we strive to love, we do not rely only on human strength, but we ask for God's power, depend on Him, and pray. Then, even in situations that seem impossible, we find that we are able to love.

II. The Actions of Love

Christian love produces concrete actions. It does not stop at simply cherishing others in thought; it is expressed in deeds. Love means desiring the happiness of others and acting for it. This includes both action and restraint, both outward deeds and the thoughtful care that sometimes holds back from action. Japanese culture values such restraint as a form of compassion. Yet restraint must not be an excuse for inaction. True compassion watches for the right moment to act. Love means acting for another's happiness, waiting like a parent who loves a child and is attentive to the right time to act.

For Christians, love begins with prayer for others. But it must not end there. There is a time to pray and a time to act. Japanese people, out of consideration, often hesitate and miss the right moment to act. Even if one's kindness is misunderstood as "unwanted meddling," it is better to act. The Scripture passage we read this morning mentions not only active love but also love that refrains at the right time.

God has given us the power to love. And for Christians, this power is increased. But unless power is used, it remains unnoticed and useless. Power reveals itself only when exercised, and it grows stronger as it is used. Moreover, Christians have experienced the love of Jesus. We know His redeeming love, and we sense His daily help. Again and again, we are made aware that we are loved.

Those who know they are loved are able to love. But loving is not the same as spoiling others. Spoiled people only desire more indulgence. Christians are not spoiled by

God’s love but are shown the model of love through Jesus. We are encouraged, strengthened, and given the motivation to love: “Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.” Thus, with renewed resolve, we can love with the love by which we ourselves have been loved.

Some people seem to be born with a naturally gentle and loving character, appearing to be much better at showing love than ordinary Christians. They richly express the humanity God gave them. But there are also many Christians who were not born with such gentle traits. I, your pastor, am one of them. Compared with those naturally tender-hearted, I am lacking. Yet I, too, have received God’s new power of love, encouragement, and the example of Christ’s love. Experiencing His love, I am gradually growing in the ability to love. That growth itself is what matters. Let us grow together in love.